

Blaby Road Park

Masterplan Review 2008
(Draft for Consultation)

Borough of Oadby & Wigston



Parklife





Report for

Borough of Oadby & Wigston
Directorate of Development
and Consumer Services

by

Parklife Ltd

Design, Masterplanning and Funding
27 Holywell Row
London
EC2A 4JB

T: 0207 247 5800

F: 0207 247 5809

E: info@parklifelondon.com



CONTENTS

	page		page
1.0 INTRODUCTION	4	5.8 Major vistas / views to focal points.....	37
1.1 Brief.....	4	5.9 Disabled Access.....	37
1.2 Background	4	6.0 MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT	38
1.3 Strategic Role	5	6.1 Park management	38
1.4 Report Structure	6	6.2 Grounds Maintenance	38
2.0 SITE ANALYSIS.....	7	6.3 Sports Management.....	39
2.1 Access and Circulation	7	6.4 Staff Presence.....	40
2.2 Visual and Character Analysis.....	10	6.5 Interpretation, Education and Signage	40
2.3 Safety	12	6.6 Dog Control.....	40
2.4 Physical Analysis.....	14	6.7 Combating vandalism.....	41
2.5 Visitor Management.....	16	6.8 Promotion and marketing	42
3.0 PLANNING POLICY	18	7.0 IMPLEMENTATION	43
3.1 Policy background	18	7.1 Project Priorities.....	43
3.2 Quality, quantity and accessibility	18	7.2 The Implementation Process and Accountability	43
3.3 Assessment of Need	20	7.3 Community Engagement during Implementation.....	44
4.0 PUBLIC CONSULTATION	21	7.4 Cost Estimates and Phasing.....	45
4.1 Previous Consultation.....	21	7.5 Funding	50
4.2 Consultation for this Report.....	21	7.6 What next?.....	51
4.3 Ongoing Consultation.....	22	APPENDIX A. AUDIT OF CONDITION OF PARK FACILITIES	52
4.4 Ongoing Role of the 'Friends'.....	23	APPENDIX B. PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY RESULTS	56
4.5 Engaging with Young People.....	23	APPENDIX C. REFERENCES.....	61
5.0 DESIGN CONCEPT	27	APPENDIX D. POSSIBLE EVENTS	62
5.1 Principles agreed with Steering Group.....	27		
5.2 Proposals (Figures 4 and 5).....	28		
5.3 Pedestrian / Cyclist Circulation	34		
5.4 Night-time Access.....	35		
5.5 Information Points	35		
5.6 Vehicular access and parking	36		
5.7 Planting Concept	36		



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Brief

In October 2007 the Borough Council commissioned Parklife Ltd to review the Blaby Road Park Masterplan, produced in 1996 by Parklife's director Phil Heaton for South Wigston. The aim of the commission is to present a strategic vision for Blaby Road Park that will:

- increase its capacity and enjoyment as a public park for all sections of the population.
- help with the regeneration of South Wigston.

The brief required the consultants to assimilate the views and needs of the surrounding community and user groups, local people, the Borough Council and other stakeholders. The Masterplan would then be finalised, together with a costed implementation plan, to reflect both the client's aspirations and the outcome of the consultation exercises. Based upon this information, the Council could then commence a phased programme of improvements to the park as funding permits.

The Council briefed Parklife about the park using earlier studies and records of surveys and consultation exercises undertaken prior to Parklife's appointment. During the project, Parklife encouraged local people to participate in drawing up this plan, to support and

expand upon previous consultation that had been carried out. It is important to stress that the brief required Parklife to assimilate and update (not duplicate) previous work and consultation.

A detailed site analysis of the park and its immediate surroundings was undertaken and is described in the following section. Fed into that analysis were the outcomes of the above consultation exercises involving local stakeholders, which are described in Appendix B. Also fed into that analysis are the results of previous work by others, listed in Appendix C. Parklife's proposals therefore represent a synthesis of ideas and opinions, distilled into this report, which once approved will guide the future of Blaby Road Park.

1.2 Background

The park is located on Blaby Road in South Wigston, one of the most deprived areas in Leicestershire outside the city itself. The park lies within the South Wigston Conservation Area and close to the Blaby Borough boundary. The park is an important strategic recreational open space serving the leisure needs of the immediate area and beyond. The Council have long recognised that the park's position close to the town centre can further enhance the attractiveness of



the area as a place to live, work and shop, and aid the wider regeneration initiatives taking place.

Blaby Road Park occupies 5.9 hectares (14.5 acres), bounded by the Jacob's biscuit factory to the west, Blaby Road to the north and South Wigston residential areas to the south and east. In its run-down state, the park offers basic facilities for recreation, including a bowling green, modern pavilion, sports fields, play areas and seating in grass open space.

Blaby Road Park has a history as a recreation ground within a Conservation Area of Victorian age. The residential area has grown and the recreation ground no longer meets the modern recreation needs of the neighbourhood. In terms of town planning, Blaby Road was the main cross route and was lined by many of the shops and public buildings. Before the establishment of South Wigston in 1883, the area was largely open fields. In 1840 a railway line was created between Leicester and Rugby, which ran parallel to and just west of the western park boundary today. Evidence of the former railway is still visible along the western park boundary. Canal Street was the home of most of the industrial and manufacturing concerns and had shops on some street corners and some public buildings especially at the north end. The canal that runs south of the township was opened in 1792 and lies within a 5-minute walk of the park.

Today parts of the park retain their historic character, although the overall character is uninspiring. There is still formal bedding retained at the Blaby Road

entrance, but few other signs that the site is little more than a utilitarian recreation ground.

1.3 Strategic Role

Blaby Road Park is a valuable and multi-faceted resource; it is particularly important given its location in a densely populated urban area. At present the park functions as a low-key recreational resource at a local or neighbourhood level. However we believe there is tremendous scope to upgrade, expand and publicise the park's role as a community, educational and leisure asset and outdoor entertainment venue.

The site lies on an important local shopping street Blaby Road, and is surrounded by key public land uses including a public house, health centre, church, community centre, school, library and shopping area. None of these facilities appear to use or interact with the park; this is both a great loss and a great opportunity. Our proposals seek to encourage adjacent land users and the surrounding community to take an active role in the future development, use and day-to-day management of the park. The improvement of Blaby Road Park will form part of the comprehensive and all embracing, approach to economic, social and physical regeneration sought by the South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan 2008.

We propose to maximise the potential amenity value of the open space both for informal and formal

recreation and more specifically for the advancement of healthy living in South Wigston.

Once the park is transformed it will become in effect an oasis in a dense urban area lacking in strong parks, and will attract a great deal more use.

1.4 Report Structure

Parklife's proposals in this report are derived from an open and transparent process of analysing the park's existing attributes and numerous past studies and consulting its users; this open process allows the proposals to be easily reasoned and justified.

The analysis of the existing park and its use is summarised in Section 2. From this analysis coupled with consultation results, a logical series of proposals is derived. The proposals are described in Section 5 with management and funding recommendations in the final sections. Supporting information is included in the Appendices.



The attractive Grand Union Canal 5min walk south of Blaby Road Park



Typical furniture passed en route



2.0 SITE ANALYSIS

A detailed site analysis of the park and its immediate surroundings was undertaken during autumn 2007 and is summarised on the sketch plans (figures 1-3) on the following pages. The following notes should be read in conjunction with the plans. The design possibilities can then be interpolated in imaginative ways to create the Design Concept, which follows this section.

2.1 Access and Circulation

(ref. Figure 1)



Circulation currently does not respond to desire lines.



Main park entrance from south at Lansdowne Grove

'CABE has found that the most successful examples draw on a rigorous analysis of the site and its surroundings to provide a (design) that is particular to its locality and which integrates well with it'
CABE Design Review2 2005

Park **entrances** from adjacent residential areas are generally understated (see picture left) and could do more to attract visitors into the park by enhancing the overall sense of arrival.

Pedestrian access is indiscriminate from all boundaries and there is an overly direct marginal spine route along one edge of the site through the site that is causing:

- people to pass through the park quickly, rather than stay and utilise it;
- limited scope for visitors with/on wheels to venture into the open spaces of the park.
- thus an under use of the park.
- conflicts of use (e.g. between cyclists and the public)
- motorcycle use of the site as a cut-through
- lack of privacy for park users, with all spaces exposed to the edge path.

The park offers a through-route to the open **countryside** less than 1km to the south.



Connection to countryside at Crow Mills, 5 minutes walk from the park

While this connection has not been exploited on the ground, proposals to do so are contained in the South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan 2008.

There is an opportunity to develop a cohesive *footpath network*, which makes more effective use of the overall site and links the overall site e.g. around perimeter and offsite.

There is an opportunity to exploit *potential links* with adjacent green spaces and neighbouring buildings e.g. health centre, churches, colleges and community buildings thereby drawing life into the park from the urban area that it serves.

"Principle" access points on the plan are understated visually and do little to acknowledge the presence of the park. For example, the main park entrance off Blaby Road has some relic Victorian flower beds and an entrance information sign, but their 'welcome' is diminished by the cars, cluttered furniture and regulation signs.

There is vehicular access off Blaby Road and limited parking provision for park users (approximately 10 spaces) and for the disabled (3 spaces). Both areas take up valuable space in what is a relatively small park and are likely to attract parking by students with no permits for college parking. Alternative parking is available at Tesco opposite the park.

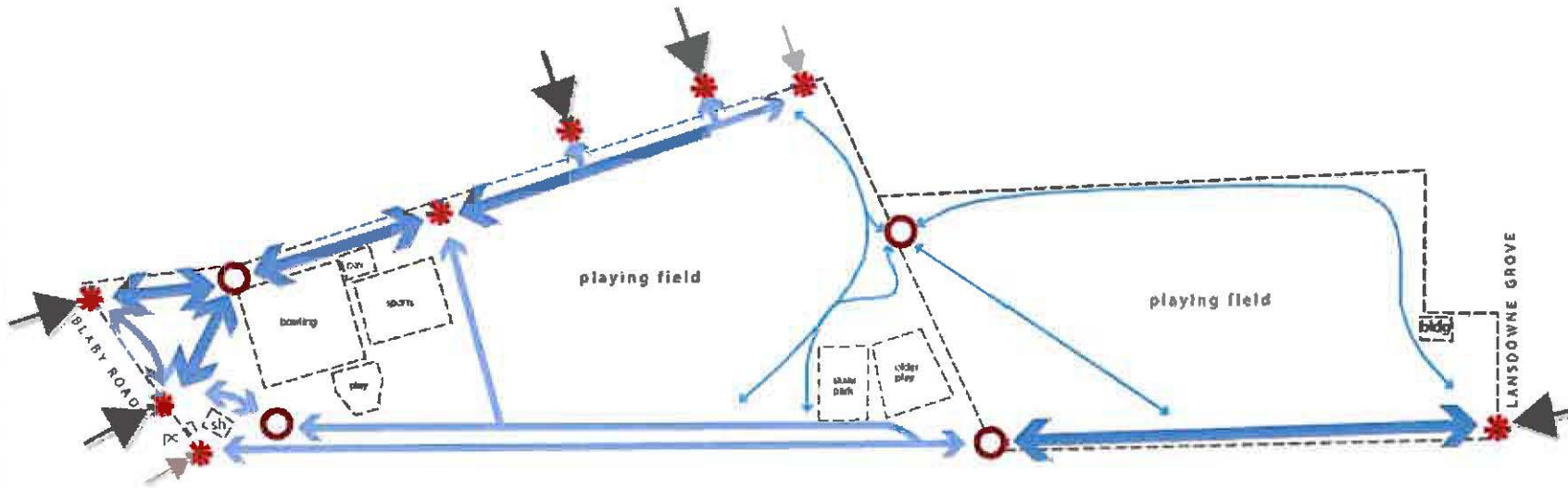
"Secondary" access points are insignificant as routes to the park in terms of their level of use. On Blaby Road (see Figure 1) the secondary access point merely duplicates the main entrance to the park, and makes little difference in distance as a short cut. However, it is a historic path known locally as "Hang Gates Path", formerly associated with the railway that formed the western boundary of the park.

The **pattern of paths** within the park is disorganised and unimaginative, concentrating on transferring people from A to B rather than the quality of the experience on the way. Linear paths follow the eastern and western boundaries flanking the park, with occasional transverse paths dissecting the space between. While it may not be economic to re-route established paths, there is potential to enhance the visitor experience *en route*. There is also scope to remove duplicated paths that occupy valuable space in the park.









FIGURE 1



Notes
 The alignment and dimensions are the copyright of the designer.
 All, partly existing and additional work as it appears and
 agrees the information contained herein shall not be used in
 plans or in part or otherwise in other projects without the written
 consent of Parklife Ltd.
 No part, name, or dimensions to be printed or etc. All information
 is given for general use for general advice only.



KEY

-  14-22/HR
 -  6-14/HR
 -  1-5/HR
 -  Major nodes- points of change in experience and direction
 -  Minor nodes- points of change in direction
 -  Principal access points, mostly understated
 -  secondary access points, unofficial entrances to park
 -  Existing physical barriers/ division of site.
- Average weekday pedestrian flows,
some on unsurfaced routes

Date	Issue	By	Description

Parklife
 PARKLIFE LTD
 37 HOLYWELL ROW
 LONDON EC2A 4EB
 T: +44 (0) 207 247 8900
 F: +44 (0) 207 247 8908
 E: info@parklife-london.com

Project Title
BLABY ROAD PARK

Phase
FOR INFORMATION

Drawing Title
**SITE APPRAISAL:
 CIRCULATION**

Drawn	Checked	Drawn	Scale
PH	PH	13 12 07	NTB
Aut No.	Drawing No.	Revisions	



Some unsurfaced routes are used as circular routes around the park rather than as short-cuts, by joggers and dog-walkers for example. This should be encouraged since it optimises the use of the open space as a whole.

Traffic noise from Blaby Road mars enjoyment of this end of the park. While the new roundabout and signalised crossing (installed since the 1996 original of the report) help to reduce average traffic speed and noise, traffic along Blaby Road is both heavy and congested at peak times. Here, methods of screening the source of noise as seen from the park would reduce the apparent intrusion.

The “**nodes**” indicated in Figure 1 occur along the boundaries of physical division of the site and can be thought of as “doors” or points of change in experience. These are useful design cues.

The park offers a popular **through-route** from the town centre shops and employment centres to the residential areas south of Blaby Road. The design will explore ways of encouraging people to stay in the park rather than simply to pass through it.

2.2 Visual and Character Analysis

(ref. Figure 2)



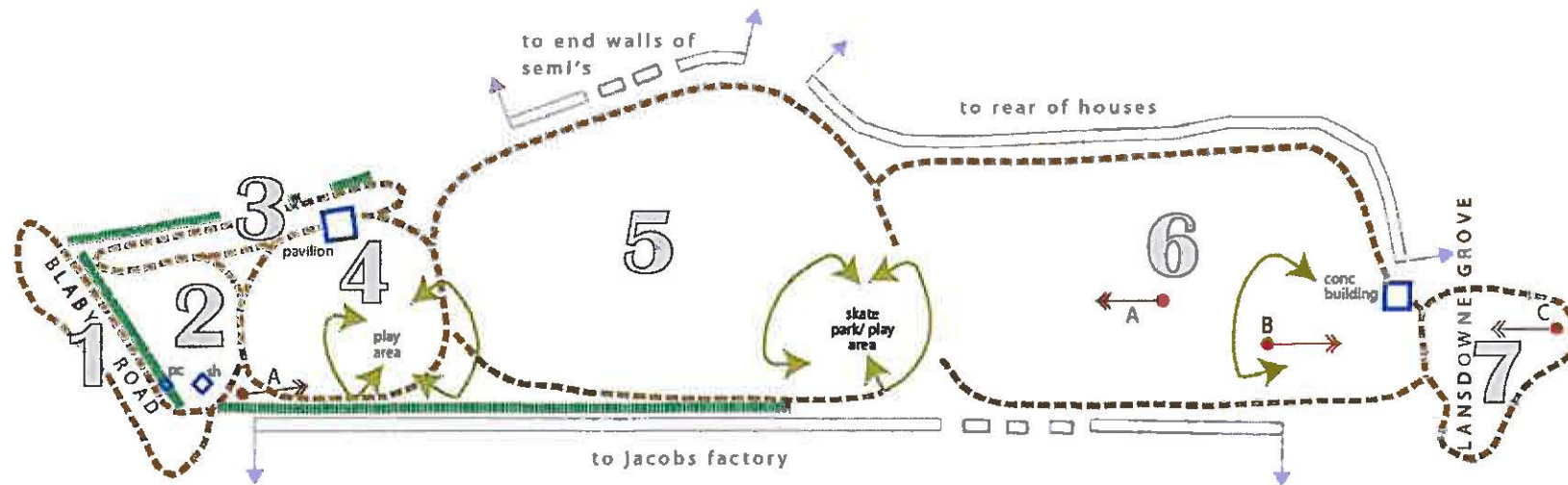
The site lacks colour, fine views or focal points to draw the visitor onward.

Piecemeal development has fragmented the original landscape into a series of parcels with an uncomfortable juxtaposition of elements and changes in character within short distances. For example, play areas have been sited in the middle of open grass. If addressed this lack of assimilation would make for a more cohesive and attractive park.

FIGURE 2



Notes
 This document and its contents are the copyright of the designer.
 Any party copying this document does so at their own risk and the designer and designer's staff accept no liability for any errors or omissions.
 No part of this document is to be distributed or used in any way without the express prior written consent of Parklife Ltd.
 All information is for reference only and is not to be used for any other purpose.



KEY

Undesirable focal points to be addressed

Onsite views which detract from the parks character- to be addressed by design

Undesirable offsite views to be alleviated by design

Long views/vistas with strong potential to enhance:
 A. Open space with hedgerow on distant horizon
 B. To distant countryside/ edge of town
 C. Long views into park

Strong lines of trees contributing to character of adjacent areas.

6 Character areas:

1. Transitional, busy space longitudinal, one-sided uncomfortable traffic impact
2. Enclosed, municipal park, small scale
3. Leafy corridor dominated by pavillion & bowling green fenced.
4. Ordered activity area
5. Open grass, uninteresting, no features
6. Open grass, long vistas, uninteresting, tree-less
7. Suburban greenspace

Date	Auth	Rev	Description

Parklife
 PARKLIFE LTD
 27 HOLYWELL ROW
 LONDON EC2A 4JD
 T: +44 (0) 207 347 8800
 F: +44 (0) 207 347 8808
 E: info@parklifelondon.com

Project Title:
BLABY ROAD PARK

Phase:
FOR INFORMATION

Drawing Title:
SITE APPRAISAL: VISUAL

Drawn	Checked	Date	Scale
PM		13.12.07	NTS
Job No.	Drawing No.	Revisions	



There is tremendous opportunity to recreate a more seductive and rich character and to increase visitor interest by providing a smoother transition between areas of different character.

There is an overall feeling of neglect reinforced by the many disparate and derelict pieces of furniture and fences. This is especially evident around the sports pitches and at the southern end.

The greatest source of visual intrusion detracting from the grassy open character of the park is the urban edge of residential and industrial areas along almost the FULL LENGTH of the park. Foreground interest in most views is limited, so the eye tends to be drawn towards the unsightly edge of the park. The park masterplan needs to address this intrusion, while it will be mitigated at the northern end by the attractively designed college. Expanses of underused grass pitches surrounded by tired, neglected planting and broken fencing. Utilitarian areas dominating key central position in park, strongly enclosed by unsightly built edges (fences, suburban architecture, etc) and of poor visual quality. This can be addressed by design.

The abundance of intrusive elements, the impact of the urban edges and the paucity of focal points, colour, fine views and planting should be addressed by this masterplan.

The most attractive vista is currently towards distant countryside beyond the park to the south, although there are other vistas (noted in Figure 2) that could be enhanced. There is great potential in the design to create new vistas to new focal points.

There is huge potential to enhance the character and soul of the park. This could be achieved by boosting community involvement, by introducing variations in landform to give interest to the flat topography whilst also screening offsite views. A strong planting framework would provide interest, help screen undesirable views and better assimilate the facilities into the park.

Most areas are outward-looking, across grassy space towards some undesirable focus or edge. One area in the park, noted in Figure 2 as Character Area 2, offers strong design potential as a sheltered, more intimate space. Fortunately this area lies at the main entrance to the park off Blaby Road, and could therefore draw in more passers-by.

2.3 Safety

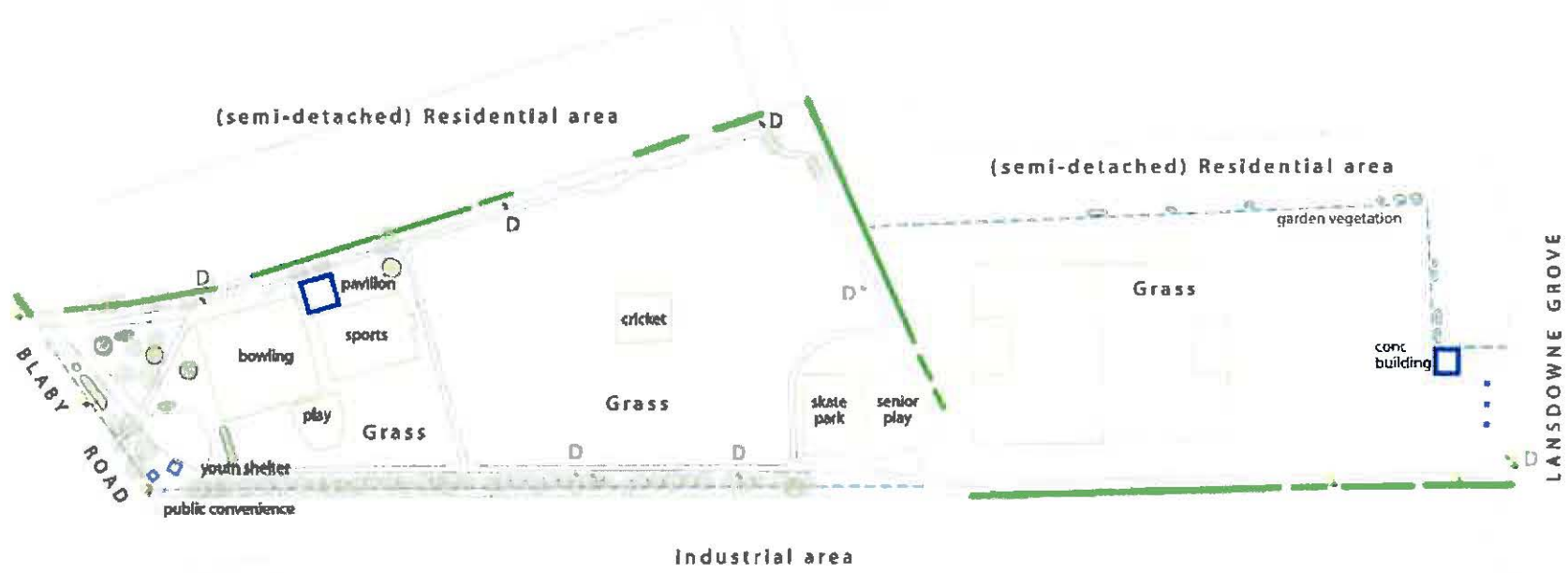
Safety by design is key issue of Blaby Road Park that needs addressing, particularly if more facilities and planting are to be introduced. The sense of personal safety is made worse by a number of factors that this study seeks to remedy. According to the Police, recorded crime in Blaby Road Park is no higher than average for the area, but the fear of crime must be addressed in any proposals.

There are several unlit entrances to the park from residential areas. Proposals for the proposed college along the western boundary do not appear to have fully addressed the security of the park frontage.

FIGURE 3



Note:
 This document and its contents are the copyright of the designer.
 Any party requiring the document must pay its copyright and
 agree that subsequent amendments must not be submitted or
 made or in any way be deemed to have altered the original plan
 without consent of the designer.
 No reliance, or dependence is to be placed on this. All information
 and items shown are for reference only.



KEY

- Existing trees- all require surgery
- Existing historic hedgerows with ecological value
- Existing dog bins
- Existing fences
- Existing lights (two inside park are probably former railway signals)
- Existing asphalt paths (in moderate condition)
- Existing dog bins

Date	Issue / Rev	Description

Parklife
 PARKLIFE LTD
 37 HOLYWELL ROAD
 LONDON EC2A 4JB
 T: +44 (0) 207 287 8800
 F: +44 (0) 207 287 8808
 E: info@parklife.london.com

Page 4 of 10
BLABY ROAD PARK
 FOR INFORMATION
 Drawing Title
**SITE APPRAISAL:
 PHYSICAL**
 Drawing No. 13 1207
 Date: NTS
 Scale: NTS

Note: All positions are approximate only, for design information



The good natural surveillance from surrounding buildings along the full eastern boundary should be utilised in the design.

There are several Safe-by-design principles that the Police advise to apply. For example, vegetation should not be allowed to obscure sightlines across and into the park, or provide hiding places. Key routes across the park should be well lit. The best way to improve park safety is to increase visitor numbers, a key aim of this masterplan.



Greater community ownership of the park would reduce vandalism.

2.4 Physical Analysis

(ref. Figure 3)

i. Land use changes

Figure 3 shows the proposed site of a new community college for South Leicestershire on neighbouring land. As an approved planning application, the college is likely to bring a major change in the nature and number of park users. Hence the design process in the following Sections takes account of this change while ensuring that the design still works in the unlikely event of the college development not proceeding.

ii. Landform

A detailed topographical survey by a specialist firm will be required, including the accurate plotting of all existing features, to inform the production and implementation of working drawings.

The land rises very gently north-south to a transverse hedge and ditch crossing the centre of the park. There is potential to create greater enclosure and landscape interest within the park by manipulation of the landform.

iii. Services

There are underground Severn Trent tanks at the southern end of the park that are still in use and while they limit the scope for major change near Lansdowne Grove, there have been significant improvements here (described in 2.4vi). A composite plan of existing underground and overhead



services will need to be compiled to inform the development of detailed designs and working drawings.

iv. **Vegetation**

There is remarkable absence of fine trees in the park. Most of the park's mature trees lie at the northern end near Blaby Road, with some good specimens dating from the turn of the century. There are some fine trees remaining along the eastern boundary between Blaby Road and the Bowling Green but these are confined to the edge of the park. All trees would benefit from improved management and thinning, in particular the Poplar belt along the western boundary.

Shrub planting is sparse and shrubs are typically over-mature or of low ornamental and ecological value. New shrub planting could greatly increase the enjoyment of the park, but needs careful thought in terms of personal safety and maintenance. There is a good structure of historic native hedgerows (indicated in Figure 3) which is the most valuable vegetation in the park and offers potential for extension elsewhere.

In general, there is huge potential to enhance the layout and experience of the park with imaginative planting design. To meet modern needs by recognising the present popularity of gardening as a leisure activity, the park should offer the very best in garden design and technique. For example, seasonal variation, themed planting (e.g. for shade, poor soil, wildlife, etc.), sustainable gardening practices and sensory are some issues.

v. **Ecology**

In its current condition most of the park is considered to be of low ecological value for a number of reasons:

- planting is largely ornamental;
- tree groups are limited in species content, lack age diversity and understorey vegetation is absent;
- shrubs are typically non-native and over-mature;
- grassland has been intensively managed for many years;
- there are no natural habitat areas of note.

The hedgerows are valuable ecologically due to their age (>100yrs), continuity and species. There is tremendous potential to increase the overall ecological value of the park, particularly in view of the proximity of open countryside.

vi. **Buildings/structures**

The condition of the park's facilities was studied (summarised in Appendix A) for this report to give an updated picture for the masterplan design, in particular costs.

The park has a sports **pavilion** (built c.1996) in a utilitarian architectural style, which provides social space, storage for the bowls club and changing for pitch sports. The social space does not appear to be shared by multiple users, but this is a management issue.

There is also an old brick **pavilion and toilet block** of uncertain age (it is not shown on the 1930 OS map) located in the north corner of the park adjacent to Blaby Road. It has a less



incongruous architectural style and lends itself well to refurbishment for new uses.

Other buildings include a youth shelter located next to the car park and an unsightly **concrete block building** on the southern park boundary, formerly hired by a theatre production group (in a very poor condition). Since 1996 the three **raised manholes** and an **electricity sub-station** near the southern boundary, which made an unwelcoming entrance to the park from the south, fortuitously have been removed/levelled. This greatly improves the potential for improving the park character at the southern end.

There are two **play areas**, one largely serving the under-5 age bracket and the other including a fenced skate park serving older children. Both areas are visually intrusive in the park and while they are well used, they have limited play value due to their limited range of equipment and unimaginative design. Emerging guidance from Play England (featuring Parklife's work) promotes an inclusive approach to play area design that engages the users (children) using bespoke design and avoids formulaic 'free design' solutions offered by single play equipment companies.

Some **seats and bins** have been placed at intervals along the perimeter footpath, although only the toddler play area has seating. There are no groupings of seats in the park that would encourage social interaction. There are plenty of dog bins, in *ad hoc* locations in the park.

Boundary **fencing** is of various styles and heights including railings, unsightly steel palisade and chain link. The park's perimeter fencing (plotted in Figure 3) deters access to the

rears of private gardens and can be bolstered with a native Quickthorn hedge if necessary, as present elsewhere. There is tremendous potential to upgrade the overall image of the park by introducing consistency to the style and restoration of buildings, site furniture and fencing.

vii. **Sports Use**

The park offers markings for cricket and football (one football pitch in regular use and another marked out for occasional use), a bowling green in regular use and hard courts in multiple use (with worn markings). The cricket square suffers damage located on a football pitch. There is a need to strike a balance between the use of the park as a sports ground and its use for casual recreation, since there is clearly a need to accommodate both kinds of use in the limited land area available.

2.5 Visitor Management

i. **Information**

There appears to be no proactive visitor management in the park. For example, after the notice boards at the Blaby Road entrance there is no further visitor interpretation information throughout the park. The provision of maps, signposts or distance markers would improve the visitor experience hugely. For example, given the number of students who currently/will pass the park daily, interpretation boards could be used for educational purposes, explaining the park's social and historical context and its natural and sporting assets.



ii. **Night Closure**

Blaby Road Park is not closed at night as it is used as a thoroughfare. The Hanging Gates path is a public bridleway that must remain open by law. The park is lit and used after dark, and safety has not been reported as a major concern.



3.0 PLANNING POLICY

3.1 Policy background

The 2003 South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan was updated in 2008 so that it can contribute towards the Allocations Development Plan Document of the emerging Local Development Framework. Proposals of this Masterplan compliment those of the wider regeneration masterplan, helping to achieve its objectives. For example, the renewed park will improve opportunities for the enjoyment and appreciation of South Wigston, in relation to green infrastructure, the natural environment, the historic environment, culture and attractions.

This masterplan conforms with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, advice in PPS12 (Local Development Framework) and its associated Companion Guide. The document also conforms with PPS6 (Planning for Town Centres), the Regional Plan, the Council's emerging Local Development Framework including the adopted SPG on Play and Open Space (August 2004).

In addition the Blaby Road Park Masterplan document also conforms with PPG17 (Planning for open spaces, sport and recreation), PPS 9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation), the Council's Play Strategy, Parks and Open Space Strategy, Sport and Leisure Strategy, Cultural Strategy.

3.2 Quality, quantity and accessibility

In 2003 the Borough Council commissioned Baker Associates to undertake a preliminary audit and assessment of the quality, quantity and location of open space and recreational facilities within the Borough. There are some important implications of the report for Blaby Road Park.

The study concluded that, when taking into account the NPFA 6 Acre Standard, there was generally an appropriate overall amount of play, open space and recreational facilities in the Borough. However, a large shortfall in children's equipped playspace was identified and the report recommended that the council seek off-site contributions to address this shortfall across the Borough.

In view of its central location in South Wigston and good accessibility from the surrounding built-up area, Blaby Road Park has excellent potential to address the shortfalls in good quality, accessible open space in this Borough.

The Baker Associates report found that there is no shortage of accessible open space within a 1km catchment, however there is a significant shortfall of EQUIPPED open space containing facilities for public use.

There are several alternative sports pitches within 1km, but few with public access to facilities such as changing rooms. Guthlaxton College offers public access to facilities for



organized sport (with changing rooms) but advance booking is required (hardly very useful for impromptu cricket practice by a group of teenagers, say). The report note that local schools are reluctant to hire out pitches for public use for fear of damage that would jeopardise their own students' use. Blaby Road Park has 2 football pitches and a cricket pitch, parking and basic changing rooms with good accessibility. This masterplan review investigates whether, if the facilities were improved, they would help to address the shortfall in this part of the Borough.

Most of the Borough's pitches are not floodlit and cannot be used at night. The report noted that most Council-owned outdoor pitches are water-logged and could not support intensive sports use. If the pitches facilities were improved to be able to cope with more intensive use, (e.g. drainage and maintenance upgrade) they could help to address the shortfall in this part of the Borough.

There is a large underprovision of equipped children's play space in the Borough, which the Baker Associates report in 2003 recommended to be addressed immediately. While there is plenty of amenity open space in and around South Wigston, most has no facilities for children's play – for example Taylor's Bridge Road lies a few hundred metres east of Blaby Road Park but contains no play facilities. Crow Mills picnic site a few hundred metres to the south has no play facilities.

The report found there is plenty of amenity open space locally but little good biodiversity or habitat value (i.e. mainly close-mown amenity grass pitches of schools and colleges). Blaby Road Park lies close to the SNCI at Crow Mills and has plenty

of underused space for creating new habitats to improve local biodiversity.





3.3 Assessment of Need

PPG17 Audit of Borough's Open Spaces

The Borough's PPG17-compliant green space strategy is being prepared now. Consultants are undertaking a PPG17-compliant audit and assessment of the quality, quantity and location of open space and recreational facilities within the Borough. The findings of the preliminary assessment by Baker Associates were useful for assessing need for Blaby Road Park, as follows.

Quantity and Quality of Open Space

The study concluded that there is generally an appropriate overall QUANTITY of play, open space and recreational facilities in the Borough. Most residents live within walking distance of an open space. However, there is a shortfall in the QUALITY of facilities which might draw residents to walk there. The report recommended that improving the quality of existing sites such as Blaby Road Park should be at the forefront of future work. It recommended that it would be particularly appropriate for investment arising from off site contributions to address this shortfall.

Accessibility to Open Space

The study mapped 400m pedestrian access to existing open space in the Borough, and found that most of the Borough's residents are within 400m (5 minutes walk) of some type of publicly accessible open space. Interestingly, the mapping found that western section of South Wigston is poorly served by equipped open space within a 5-minute walk, and Blaby Road Park lies within this quadrant. People will walk farther to reach larger urban parks with a wider range of facilities. The

study went on to show that if the facilities of existing parks/open spaces could be improved, then their extended catchment area of 1000m (a 15-min walk) would ensure that the western section of South Wigston would in fact be well served by open space. Across the Borough the issue is therefore one of improving the quality not the quantity of open space.

Accessibility to sports open space in the Borough is very poor, and Blaby Road Park is no exception. The study found that 74% of formal outdoor sports open spaces are privately owned thus limiting public accessibility.

In particular there was a large shortfall in children's equipped play space. Blaby Road Park has good potential to meet local play needs.